

This is the Day the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

³³ “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. ³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”
⁴¹ “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ”‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?
⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends:

You may have noticed that the Gospel lessons for the last few weeks have been parables Jesus told during the days before his arrest and crucifixion. A parable is often described as an earthly story with a heavenly or spiritual meaning. Sometimes it helps us to know when and to whom the parable was spoken to help determine the specific application. That is the case with the parable we have before us.

Jesus spoke this parable the Tuesday before he was crucified on the cross. He used this parable as a warning for the Chief Priests and the Pharisees who were abusing God’s Word, but it is also meant to encourage us to, **“Be Ready for God’s Harvest Day.”** Since God comes to us through His Word, we want to, **“Respect His Messengers,”** we want to, **“Receive His Son,”** and we also want to, **“Remember His Judgment.”**

I. This parable has a lot of different players and it helps to know what the different parts of this story represent. The Landowner isn’t a hard one to figure out – that’s God the Father. Our Old Testament reading from Isaiah points out that the vineyard is God’s chosen people, the Children of Israel. The wall, the watch tower and the winepress are symbolic of how God takes care of the needs of his people and protects them. God not only protected his people but helped supply their needs of food and shelter.

The farmers or tenants are the leaders of the Children of Israel. At the time Jesus spoke this parable, it would have been the Chief Priests and the Pharisees. The Greek word used here not only meant farmer, but it is more specific to the one who specializes in tending and growing grapes. The servants are the Old Testament prophets sent by God as messengers to his people.

In the parable, these servants were sent also to gather the harvest – the fruit. The fruit is the spiritual fruit that comes as a result of hearing God’s Word, coming to faith, and living your life according to God’s will.

The fruit therefore would be things like confessing your sins and being sorry for them, looking to God’s Word to help you resist temptation, letting God’s Word guide you in your life. Fruit would also be prayer, praise, and giving thanks to God.

As Jesus gets into telling the parable he points out that all of God’s servants were not well received. **“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.”** The treatment of the servants was terrible and yet we have to marvel at God’s love for his people. He not only sent one, or two, or even three but quite a few prophets to his people. To share his Word and his message of salvation, **“Believe in the Savior who is coming and you will have eternal life,”** yet the people rejected God’s message, they rejected God’s messengers, and in essence they were rejecting God himself.

Right now you are probably thinking, **“So what does that have to do with me?”** The Children of Israel were God’s chosen people in the Old Testament and similarly, we are God’s chosen people in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit has chosen us through Word and Sacrament by creating faith in our hearts and that faith in Jesus as our Savior, makes us one of God’s chosen people.

God blesses us just as he blessed the Children of Israel. He not only takes care of our daily needs, but he also protects us from harm and danger. And just as he looked for spiritual fruits from the Children of Israel, he also looks for spiritual fruit from us. That spiritual fruit comes as a result of faith. It comes as a result of what is in our hearts and that brings us back to God’s Word because that is how the Holy Spirit works to create faith and to help us produce spiritual fruit.

So How do we treat God’s Word? How do we treat God’s messengers? Do we take the Word seriously or do we say, “Well, whatever.” God gave us the third commandment to tell us how to treat his word. Martin Luther expanded that for us in his explanation to the 3rd commandment just in case we didn’t catch on. He tells us to, **“Fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his word.”** Despising preaching and God’s Word is exactly the sin Jesus was talking about here and is a sin that we too commit. The people threatened the OT prophets with violence and I am thankful I don’t have to worry about that but I feel disappointed, like the OT prophets when members don’t come to church or when you come and then “zone out” during the sermon or other parts of the service. God’s Word is despised when you let other things take priority over God’s Word in your lives or when other things take priority in your lives and start to crowd God’s Word out of your lives.

God’s Word is despised when you listen to what it has to say but don’t obey it – when you don’t do what it says. When we despise God’s Word we are just as bad as those people who persecuted the OT prophets but the one we really are harming is our own selves.

We are harming ourselves because we are ignoring or even pushing away the one thing that is meant to bring us peace and comfort. We are pushing away the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit works to strengthen our faith. We are pushing away the forgiveness that God offers even when we drift off during the sermon or when we fail to obey God's commands. God wants us to have a regular diet of his Word so we are regularly filled with forgiveness, peace and comfort.

Or faith in Jesus brings us these benefits because he is the cornerstone that hold everything together but as we continue with our parable we can see that the tenants did understand that.

II. They were self-centered – focused only on themselves. They thought they had it all figured out and so when the Son came, they plotted against him. They didn't need him and so they threw the Son out of the vineyard and killed him. They thought they could reap the rewards without the Son or the Landowner.

The people listening to this parable didn't know that with these words, Jesus was describing what was about to happen to him in just a few days. He was describing how the leaders of the church, the Chief Priests and Pharisees, would see that he was led out of the city and crucified. The chief priests and Pharisees were just like the tenants. They thought they had it all figured out and they didn't think they needed Jesus to get to heaven. They figured they could get their eternal reward on their own, but they had no idea just how wrong they were.

Even though Jesus was showing love to them with this warning, it just bounced off their stony hearts. Even though they rejected Jesus that does not change the fact that he is the only way to heaven. Matter of fact it fulfills the prophecy from Psalm 118 that Jesus quotes to them.

There are many people who act the same way that the chief priests and Pharisees did that day. They reject Jesus as their Savior. They believe that their own good works will carry them to heaven and yet God tells us that we are saved only by God's grace. Salvation comes to us as a gift and not because of anything we have done.

It's easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking, "I can take care of myself. I don't need God's help." So that after a while we start thinking, "I hope I'm going to heaven because I've been a good person or tried to do the right things." It's at those times that we really need God to get our attention and to help us see that we really do need our Savior. He is the only way of salvation and he wants to be the cornerstone of our faith and our lives.

When we rely on ourselves alone, it is so easy to fail, but with Christ as the foundation of our lives, we are able to weather the tough times and resist the temptations that would try and make us come tumbling down. With Christ as the cornerstone of our lives we don't have to worry about God's Judgment for we have the sure hope of eternal life, but that wasn't the case for the tenants in our parable.

III. This parable had an unusual ending in that Jesus asked the people, **"How should it end?"** The people said, **"Bring those wretches to a wretched end and rent the vineyard to other tenants."** In other words, judge them according to their deeds. And not only judge them, but take what they had and give it to other tenants. Others that will produce fruit.

That's exactly what happened. God's Word went out to what we might call other tenants. It went out to the Gentiles and into the rest of the world and it continues to do so even today. The Holy Spirit is working through that word to create faith in the hearts of those who hear it and as a result of that faith people produce fruits of faith. Those who come to know Jesus as their Savior reflect the love of Christ, confess and repent of their sins, worship God, get excited about the Gospel, pray for themselves and for others, and continue to share the Good News of Salvation.

We are those other tenants. God has come to us through his Word and now we have an opportunity to produce spiritual fruit. This parable is for us. God wants us to heed the warning Jesus gave to the chief priests and Pharisees: Don't despise preaching and the Word, but rather rejoice. Rejoice in the salvation that is yours. Rejoice because you are a Child of God. Rejoice because your faith in Jesus turns God's Judgment into an everlasting life in heaven for you and all who trust in Jesus as their Savior. Amen.